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MURAL PAINTING IN THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

THE mural paintings of the Boston Public Library mark clearly an epoch in American art. The latter has passed through many vicissitudes. In recent years it has become conscious of itself. We have multiplied art academies, art journals, art scholarships; museums, clubs, exhibitions. Yet the result has been meagre and unsatisfactory. There has been discipline without art impulse, means without an end, talk without production. Each new passing phase has swept triumphant over a helpless community. We have been very clever in imitating the personal styles of European celebrities. We have been still more clever in mastering the grammar of realistic expression. Meanwhile, the exhibitions of detached paintings, our sole device for bringing public and artist together, have become uninteresting to both parties — to the artist, because he recognizes that the atmosphere of galleries is unhealthy; to the public, because its soul, its latent need of pictorial art, has been left untouched by merely technical triumphs. The test of the artificiality of the situation is that there are practically no sales — only a

feverish supply of something which meets no normal demand.

Such has not been the case with the Arts of Architecture and Sculpture. The reason is evident. The work of the former cannot be crowded into exhibitions; and the products of both are needed for a purpose and a place. The demand for private dwellings and for public edifices is one that necessarily keeps pace with the growth of population, wealth, and taste. It is not possible to play tricks with the primary laws of construction. There is no longer a primitive demand for abstract marble Venuses or clay groups to fill the parlor window. Our modern statues are forced into strong, creative quality by the exigencies of subject and of position. Especially does our more elaborate architecture require sculpture for the enrichment of its surfaces, the accentuation of its values and scale. Of painting also it is a striking fact that every great historical school until modern times found its root and its conditions for growth in architectural needs. This is as true of Chinese and Japanese painting as of classic or Renaissance. The history of the growth of the latter is mainly the history of fresco decoration. And, as in the case of sculpture, this practical use of painting is not an accident. The demand for mural painting is a natural, healthy, and permanent one. Its capacity for development is only limited by the growth of architecture. Moreover, it is a civic art, of political importance, public; — not hidden away in the cabinets of the rich, but where all may see it, and participate in the pride

of ownership. In subject, too, it has to reckon with the public consciousness; ideals of glory, honor, or of faith. It brings people and artists into sympathy, and creates unconsciously a common æsthetic atmosphere. It is a public education in taste. It affords no chance for the weakness of idiosyncrasy or of imitation. Each problem, by its own decorative conditions, is a new one, and demands a new solution. However individual this may be, it implies constructive power. Its very scale gives widest scope for imaginative treatment; stimulates creative ability. It cannot deceive itself with the sophistries of realism. A formal "composition" of studies from models would be absurdly unsatisfactory. The artist is forced to consider the grammar of beauty, the affinities and harmonies of proportion, of line, of mass, and of color. It is this requirement which has led to our confused speaking in modern days of all elements of beauty as "decorative." Decoration indeed requires of us beauty, but can neither define its nature nor limit its uses. In panel painting also a beauty should be manifest. But it is more difficult in the latter to find a starting-point for our constructive splendors. This is furnished in mural painting by the architectural spacing and framing, by the values and coloring of the material, and in the lighting. These conditions compel the artist to translate his conception and his lines of action into terms harmonizing with their terms. Hence the stimulus to his creative imagination. In technical capacity, too, he is driven to his best. He

must be simple in his construction and in his method; large, broad, firm, swift, and daring. If he be a genius he gladly seizes upon these conditions as an opportunity to free his soul.

The great seats of mural painting in Europe have thus been epoch-making in her art history. They have done honor to their localities and to their native geniuses. Florence, Venice, Assisi — these have ever been, and are still, mines for the artist's thoughtful exploration, centres of pilgrimage to the travelling public, heirs to endless returns of ancestral capital invested in their civic and religious art.

A great hope for American art began with this clearly dawning conception of the importance of mural painting. Little was to be expected from the founding of art schools in every city, the buying of more casts, the hiring of more models, the competition for European scholarships. This would but increase the gorging of our exhibitions, not discover the healthy conditions of demand. I remember that John La Farge said some years ago there was but one bare chance for the future of modern art, and that lay in turning it into the channels of mural decoration. How nobly he has striven to convince a stubborn world by his splendid achievements is his guaranty of fame for all time as the founder of this movement. It began with the churches in our largest cities. It is spreading to the blank walls of civic edifices. There is no limit to its horizon. Every year witnesses the need for more splendid public palaces,

and a simultaneous recognition of the duty to stimulate public taste. The spirit and the wealth are lavish. Here are the conditions. Here is infinite normal demand in the place of stagnation. The history of art in America for the coming centuries must be the history of these chances.

The significance of the mural painting in the Boston Public Library should now be plain. Here we have established the first great centre of a future civic series. Here the principle is first openly, and on a large scale, acknowledged by the public authorities. By their act, and by this first blaze of achievement, we set Boston as the earliest of the seats of public pilgrimage, the veritable Assisi of American art. That the achievement, so far recorded, is worthy of the unique conditions offered, it is now a privilege and a pride to acknowledge. That here already lie planted the seeds of the greatest school of painting the world shall have known, it is perhaps hardly extravagant to hope.

The earlier experiments in an expansive movement are always of special interest and value for study. They mark for us a transition; we can trace their antecedents; we can watch untrammelled freedom exercise her wings in an atmosphere of infinite possibility; we can trace the fertile germs of what later become the triumphs and idols of an age. The series of paintings of the Legend of the Holy Grail by Abbey records for us such an experiment. Here is an American who has pushed boldly forth into the lists from the humbler field of illustration. He has already achieved fame as a master of character-

ization. He has given us deliciously diversified surfaces in the small; mysteries of dimly lighted groups, a subtle pageantry of monochromatic flashings. He teems with incident as with anecdote. Here he has chosen a noble subject — one that appeals to the imagination, to the unexhausted knighthood of our race, full of dramatic situation, aglow with the ever-mysterious coloring of loyalty and of faith. It is of prime interest to see how he will expand his powers to the requirements of the new scale, what individualistic solution of the untried problem he has to offer.

That a key-note of appeal to the imagination has been struck by Abbey, as well as by the other artists concerned in the Library decoration, is significant. Our age's boast in the practical and the material must give way before the necessarily spiritual teaching of great art. We may be sure this germ shall fructify. Our future series shall all be noble stories of human struggle, devotion, and aspiration. That Abbey has invested his subject with fine dramatic power, varied incident, and rich grouping, there can be no denial. It is like the solemnity and earnestness of a Wagnerian opera. Each face, each pose, is a new and characteristic theme. In every panel the quality of illustration is magnificently enlarged. There is endless incident to discover for the absorbed spectator; lavish resource of draughtsmanship for the admiring craftsman. Pictorially, too, the effect is sumptuous. There are the massy depths of dusk in ancient sacred halls, the serried lights of transcendent congregations, self-luminous glowings

of the holy relic, manifold reflections from mediæval armor, and the evanescent play on crowded faces of warm and low-toned shadows. In color there is equal variegation and romantic wealth. Prismatic passages flash from every corner of the canvas. No figure that is not chromatically rich with varied trappings.

But is the effect as satisfactorily decorative as it is pictorially sumptuous? Of this there may be a doubt. In all painting there is more or less of dualism: pictorial expression and pictorial construction; matter and form; thought and beauty. But in smaller detached paintings, and especially in illustration, the intellectual element is often allowed predominance, in that no conditions of environment are imposed. Pictorially, too, a work which comprises its wholeness within itself is accountable to itself alone for the reach and rhythm of its lines, for the sharpness and multitude of its contrasts, as for the absorbing and startling episodes of its color. But in mural decoration the exigencies declare at once for more restrained and limited values. The factor of expression becomes in greater measure subordinated to the claims of broad and frank beauty. The painting is no longer responsible to itself alone; it owes allegiance to the dignity and use of the room, to the trend of the architectural lines, to the shape of its spaces, the colors and values of the materials which surround it, and to the degree and quality of its lighting. Thus the power of incidents to attract the eye to their partial interest is less desirable than their contribution to sim-

ple planes of color and mass. That an object is illuminated on this side or on that, and brought out in modelled relief, is of far less importance than how it works in as a single spot with adjacent passages. Hence the normal tendency of decoration to relatively flat values. They disperse the attention to the whole, rather than focus it. Hence the difficulty of introducing strongly lighted realistic groups; for the illumination represented is almost inevitably out of scale with the actual and subdued illumination of the room. Hence the contrasts of dark and light must be fewer, less sharp and intense. Color effects also should be more diffused, and less sonorous in the individual notes. The lines which bound the masses are necessarily simpler in their scheme, more formal and clear in their sweep, analogous to the lines of construction in a building, specifically sympathetic with the adjacent architectural members.

From this point of view, one can hardly help feeling that Abbey leans a little too far to the pictorial pole. Figures are brought out in strong relief and lighting, colors are lavished in small spots upon details. There is no single dominating color tone, which, as it were, holds the other colors in solution. Contrasts of all sorts are frequent and strong. And just because the excellence lies so much in the parts, in the incidents, the fine drawing, the pictures need a stronger lighting. It is extremely difficult to see all that they prick our curiosity to see. In the multiplicity of the parts one sometimes

with difficulty makes out a figure as a whole, and identifies its action.

Especially important is it to note here that a great weakness of American, and indeed of all European painting in modern times, is its practically ignoring the existence of dark and light as an independent element of pictorial beauty. We hear always of the three factors, drawing, chiaroscuro, and color. But in the second the universal pictorial or decorative function of light and dark has been monopolized by lighting and shading, which is only one of the facts it is able to express. A hand comes light against a deep blue garment, not because it is lighted by the sun, but because it is lighter in itself; and this contrast of dark and light, though it have absolutely nothing to do with chiaroscuro, may be a more important factor in the differentiation, the sparkle and beauty of the picture. Indeed, a large proportion of the dark and light variegations of nature are local, and exist as well on a cloudy day; and thus, in truth, more clearly mark the distinction of objects as wholes than do the darks cast by shadows. But in mural decoration they become essential also as a key to structure. Orientals have always known this. We, in the West, have ignored it, in modern times especially, because we have been so persistently pursuing pure problems of lighting. We have never theoretically admitted that a great painting, whatever else it may be, must exhibit a broad and beautiful massing of dark and light parts as such, in addition to what they represent.

Until we do this, and make a systematic study of this quality, we shall be weak in an essential element of mural decoration. The first law of this quality is that the dispositions of the dark and light masses shall be simple, clear, and luminous, accentuating rather than confusing the main line systems which bound them, serving to bring out rather than to obscure the wholes of representation, and tending to identify each important mass by its separate and relatively flat value. In small black-and-white work we have recently learned to understand a little of this quality; but a real test of mastery over it is demanded when one comes to combine it with color. The guiding law here is that the main color masses must be coincident with the main masses of dark and light; that is, the latter must be so disposed as to bring out that very depth of each color which makes it most beautiful in the scheme of coloring. In large complicated painting, the Venetians alone of all the world have fully grasped this law. Any such test the work of Abbey manifestly will not satisfy. But there is no reason why we should despair of it in the future; and the matter is referred to here, because the very significance of these paintings, these first American experiments, lies not only in what they fully achieve, but in the points of growth and departure which they suggest.

The post of honor in the Library has been assigned to one who has compelled Fame to crown him a master of decoration. His, the filling of the spaces about the grand stairway, was a problem worthy of the largest creative effort. The superb

conception of the architects, dignified but rich, the ample scale, the full lighting, bequeathed to the winner of the prize an almost unparalleled opportunity. One is lost in conjecturing with what unheard-of splendor American-born genius, such as Sargent's or Whistler's, might have filled it. But it was a happy and a liberal thought to call to this, our first American Pantheon, a master of that old world in which ours had root, that master of its new art from which ours, in its untamed hope, might learn restraint.

The value of the great work of Puvis de Chavannes lies very markedly in its purely decorative solution of its problem. In this respect it is the antithesis of Abbey's. If the latter has sacrificed decorative calm to pictorial expression, the former, in loyal fidelty to the claims of its surrounding, has reduced the element of expression to a minimum. It is a supreme lesson to our public, which has been taught to stare at exhibition walls crowded with undigested transcripts of fact. It preaches a larger meaning of the word *art*. It sounds a note of chaste simplicity to the ambitious who may follow.

The antithesis of these two extreme experiments is worth regarding more minutely. No one will assert that in Chavannes's work there is much deep thought. What there is is imaginative, abstract, dealing with aspiration indeed. But it is clear that the subject is little more than an excuse for the masses. Without pricking his curiosity, the picture as gently uplifts the spectator into a

mood of calm and purity, as it unobtrusively hums a treble to the dominant of the marbles. Thus all its characteristics are as unlike as can be to those of the drama of Galahad. In the latter, every face is a study of character and expression; every line of drapery, every grouping of limbs, has been most carefully, even painfully, thought out. The human interest in its parts is its great strength. But in Chavannes's, no one, not even the artist, cares much for the individual figures or their faces. He barely leads the curiosity to identify each Muse. Even from the abstract thought of the whole the spectator experiences but a slight thrill.

This should explain why, at first sight, this painting is difficult for the public to understand. It has no human incidents. It seems empty of interest. What, then, is its supreme merit? What must we learn to admire in it as the effort of a master hand? Why was Chavannes's career so slow, but so sure, in winning his way to this pedestal? Why is this work said to sound for us a key-note of absolute decoration? Just because it has exactly the opposite of pictorially expressive qualities. It is pure art. It aims at abstract beauty of line, of dark and light massing, and of color; and that, too, not as a detached painting might also aim at these, but as diffused into the atmosphere of their architectural setting, as transfused by the guiding beauties of the latter's structure. There is no question of what in the parts we are to focus our eye upon. It is how, as we glance calmly about the hall, we

feel rather than see them blend softly into its palatial masses.

Let us mark more clearly, as corollaries, the æsthetic features. Not only are there no incidents; there is even a conscious blurring of the accepted details. The very features are treated but as contributions to a mass. The artist is determined that no professional cleverness in sharp limb-drawing, and no conventionally classic beauties of his classic poses shall mar by extrinsic charm the clear current of the total impression. Intricacy of composition, required, as in Abbey's, by a dramatic subject, is avoided. We have but two symmetrical groups floating like wings, or feathers, from a vertical axis. They are barely more than cloud-films, half materializing into sculpturesque form against a dreamy world of atmospheric blues and greens. Mark again that there is no contrast, either sharp or strong, of any dark and light masses, which might attract the eye to themselves. The very shimmer of the golden leaves, which serve to throw back the distance, is refused the accent of a differentiating value. Again, there are no details to color, as in Abbey's mediæval regalia. The tints shall be as broad and simple as those of architecture itself. Thus it dawns upon us that Chavannes's purpose has not been to create a picture, to stimulate our imagination, or to conjure up a wealth of æsthetic resources, but to consecrate everything to a single grand relation. In this enormous self-restraint we witness the supreme triumph of the decorative idea.

But now, after enforcing this primary lesson, it is just to ask whether, within the limits of his own problem, the lines of his own strength, Chavannes has achieved unqualified success. Considering the splendor and scale of the world he was summoned to enter, might we not have expected his genius, in its very poise, to have diffused therein a more potent light, a more inspiring revelation? Would not the imagination, warmed by the adjacent marbles, have absorbed without check a more soul-stirring appeal?

Such a suspicion is deepened when we come to consider the technical beauties. After all, the negative of wrong, though a needful preliminary, should but clear a way for the positive assertion of right. Art does not merely obey laws; it revels in the gardens which they license. Thus, in the proportions of Chavannes's composition, no one can deny that the main line relation is based upon the meaning and action of the figures. There is no confusion; but neither is there enough wealth to match the sumptuousness of the architecture. Again, it is not sufficiently inspired in line. The greatest art has always regarded line as something more than the anatomical structure of a painting. It is the analogue of melody in music, which, though simple, is all-pervasive, fine, pure, sweet, flowing, entrancing. The dark and light suggests a similar thought. Still there is no confusion; but just because there is almost nothing to confuse. Here is afforded an unexpected proof of the thesis that a sense of dark and light as such is almost lack-

ing in Western art, and that the lack is due to pre-emption of the field by the narrower thought of chiaroscuro. Abbey's work is deficient in dark and light because it has not freed itself from the conventional conception of lights and shadows. Chavannes's is deficient because, having freed itself from light and shadow, there is no dark and light left. These two extremes serve to emphasize a common defect. Lastly, in color, has not Chavannes, in his very self-restraint, been too chary of his resources? Granting that his color is beautiful as far as it goes, should we not prefer it to be less modest? And why the cold gray color-gaps of the figures seated on either side of the door? If the excuse be that they are marble statues, does this not frankly admit the discrepancy between their key and the marbles of the hall?

In this contrast of Chavannes's work with Abbey's lies one of the most interesting lessons of the Library paintings; and it is striking here to notice also that, while the low lighting of the delivery room conceals the expression which the latter is driven to obtrude, the full lighting of the stairway eloquently calls for a wealth of pictorial beauty which the former has been as anxious to suppress.

But now, if Abbey's work leans too far to the pole of expression, and Chavannes's too far to the pole of decoration, what shall we say of Sargent's fragment, blazing upon the firmament of art like a new comet? At least this — that it strives magnificently to hold together these two factors as equal, blended indistinguishably into the total impression.

Here emerges a far higher conception of synthesis than that of subordination to decorative keys; namely, the adequate translation of fact into beauty, thought into pictorial passage, the language, the music of line, dark and light, and color. The space assigned, and the subject chosen, have lent their weight to this balance. The panoramic continuity of Abbey's frieze clearly foreshadowed a path of narrative. The external majesty of the stairway, overpowering Chavannes's spontaneity, drove him into bald abstractions. But in the upper hall Sargent was unfettered by any narrow problem of proportion. He found only plain, plastered spaces for an architectural guide, shapes which pleaded for solidity of composition. He was free to range through enormous vistas of symbolic thought, consecrated with the mantle of imagination, and magnetic with the charge of elemental, pictorial splendor.

Both phases of Sargent's work are infinitely rich, a thing almost without precedent. In the other works we can trace their antecedents; they are expansions of known principles and methods. This is the unheralded leap of genius, like lightning out of the dark. It is a new idea, organic in its own right, winning its way at once with all parties, in the teeth of theory, amid the wreck of the traditions it defies. One marvels at the grasp of a mind which can grapple at once with two independent hosts of difficulties, think of such myriad relations in all their mutualities. It is the test of intellectual power, that holding a whole and its

parts in perfect balance, it shall reduce them to one crystal solution. How grandly Sargent has thus conceived his subject the scholar may best decide. He condenses for us into a single mental appeal the essences of Egyptian, Assyrian, Phœnician, and Hebrew thought, and that in the tragedy of their relation to the civilization and the spiritualization of the world. Here imagination is demonstrated to be, not the antithesis of intellect, but its highest potence. After this it will be impossible to draw back to that narrow American platform which has deprecated feeling, spontaneity, the rush of individuality, the sense of the strange, the unanalyzable appeal to the soul, as affectations. Sargent will have rendered imagination not only possible, but fashionable; even better, necessary. And a very demonstration of art's unique value is just this capacity to marshal into a single illumination truths which Science or History would require many unreadable volumes coldly to demonstrate. This is the very meaning of Symbolism as the inmost soul of art. The world is more than a congeries of fact, by the infinity of unphotographable relations which underly them. These constitute in themselves an inner order, which we may call Divine Law or Reason, in virtue of which all things in the world become significant of one another. And such significance it is the unique privilege of art to discern and find a direct means to express. That poetry shall do this by the magic suggestion of words, we allow. But Sargent reveals to us anew how line and color can

charge with this a still more direct appeal to the eye.

Here we have the key to the technical qualities of Sargent's work — his complementary infinity on the side of pictorial beauty. It is this which reveals him as a painter, not a philosopher — that his mental appeal is, in its very essence, an appeal to the eye. The magic of expressing the inexpressible is compassed by the subtle suggestions of proportion, line, and color. Here again it baffles us to conceive how the artist could think of so many pictorial interdependencies all at once. It requires incredible genius thus to fill in the many terrible gaps in our modern schemes of art education. A problem of beauty in simplest form — say one of straight lines, a black-and-white construction in two flat tones, an unorchestrated theme of soft blues and greens and pearls, like Chavannes's — is difficult enough in itself. Yet our art students seldom receive formal instruction in any one of these. Everything is ordinarily sacrificed to the Moloch of fact-expression. Yet if no exercise is ever afforded to create in simple forms of beauty, what chance is there for us when we are forced to use simultaneously, in balance and in harmony with one another, a dozen, a hundred, distinct species of pictorial construction? The very meaning of technique, of virtuosity, is the infinite resource of devising actual brush-strokes which shall satisfy at once this clamorous crowd of æsthetic demands. Such invention belongs to a doer, not a dreamer. Sargent had no precedent. Style is the way of

solving a practical problem; and Sargent had the most complicated problem human genius has ever dared to handle. Therefore has he flashed upon us the magnificence of a new style, whose supernal delicacies and powers are most patent to all in the film-clad vision of Astarte.

Let us now briefly focus our attention upon these technical wonders in detail. Under the apparent complicity lies perfect order. The three primary divisions of the space contain the three primary divisions of the thought. On the arched ceiling above, the weight of Oriental symbolism, with its mixture of dimly discerned truths and demoralizing superstitions, hangs inwoven with the black vault of Night, whose world of starry elements alone can measure the lapse of endless time. On the frieze below, like pillars, stand the incarnations of the voice of God in the human soul—those captains of the seers, who have won for the race of Israel the spiritual hegemony of the West. In the lunette between, huddles in violence and suffering the world of man, hedged in by the duality of these antagonistic superhuman planes, but proved by its very capacity for suffering to be worthy of the higher spiritual heritage.

In each of these three divisions, again, the order of the thought guides the æsthetic proportion. The primary differentiation of the frieze is superb; spreading at the wings into the extremes of despair and of hope, with their counternote, and centring the prophetic phalanx with the Michelangelesque figure of Moses and his Law, as the Rock of Ages.

In the ceiling's elemental world of cycles, brute powers, and lusts, we find a correspondent threefold spacing. Here the occult symbolism becomes too complicated for brief tracing; but we can see at bottom that it is the Trinity of the luminaries — the sun, the moon, and the stars. And here arises the first doubt, whether the lack of symmetry in this balance, though possibly required for the proportions of thought, is decoratively as clear. It was doubtless caused by the vision of Neith as a human suggestion, whose head and breast could hardly be brought into the centre of the arch. Yet it was much to sacrifice, the architecturally calm balance dominating the rest of the composition; and the chosen arrangement is doubtless the cause of a certain confusion in looking at the effect as a whole. One can hardly restrain a regret, too, that the monopolizing of so much space by the comparatively repulsive Moloch, though he be a sun-god, should have constrained into narrow limits the exquisite human symbolism which identifies with moon-phases so many manifestations of beauty, of art, of pleasure, and of desire. The division of the lunette is primarily fourfold: the weights of Assyrian and Egyptian tyranny, the crouching Israelites, and the intervention of the Supreme; but this fourfold spacing has been reduced to the architectural threefold arrangement, by superposing the fourth upon the third, and relegating the others to the wings. Here the only question arises whether too much space has not been allowed to these ethnic groups at the side,

which have to be filled in with objects of secondary importance.

From the structure of proportional divisions let us pass to the specific themes of the line relations. Here one can hardly but feel that, in the almost endless complexity, some purity and continuity of rhythmic flow has been lost. It is not, as in Abbey's, that the lines are more expressive than melodious; nor, as in Chavannes's, that though melodious, they murmur but a faint tune. It is that the lines, while surcharged with artistic sensitiveness, are overwrought by this stress to a degree which, as in some modern orchestral music, loses the theme in the very wealth of its own involutions. This is especially the case with the ceiling. Even after familiarity, it seems hopeless to include it all in a single æsthetic impression. In the lunette, again, in spite of its clear spacing, we see a tendency to confusion. It may, perhaps, be said that it was the artist's intention to produce such an effect; yet we question the legitimacy of some harsher passages, such as the cutting lines of the square Egyptian wings, which refuse to resolve into the main key; even as in Berlioz, the stress of the romantic fancy sometimes startles itself into contrasts whose brute power and strangeness are in excess of their musical beauty. But in his treatment of the prophets Sargent proves himself absolute master. He stands side by side with the greatest creators of all times. We find, what we lack in Abbey's and in most modern work, a beautiful rhythm of simple line which flows with-

out effort from the action of each figure. The contrast of Chavannes's superficially similar line is in its lack of vitality. The few simple sweeps of his drapery are harmonious, but abstract. There is no force of mind or of physique beneath them. This contrast is well marked if we compare Chavannes's interesting figure on the extreme left with Sargent's Hosea. Both face to the front; both present masses of white; both are severe in line. Yet how much more is the beauty of the latter, without being less decorative, charged with the unity and mentality of action! Here, as everywhere, is revealed Sargent's supreme power of drawing.

In color, verbal criticism is necessarily more impotent. Sargent's splendid innovation is in the use of gold and silver as flat gleaming pigments, whose shading he manipulates by relief. So far from being an anomaly of reversal, this is the winning of an advanced orchestration. The moment we frankly admit that color has rights of its own, which are non-representative, we loosen the bonds of legitimacy. Who can doubt that the solid keystone block of Moses, whose sculptural relief and dead gray flesh are as unlike in scale to the quiet liquid splendor of the prophets' painted robes, as to the flat black and gold of his own enwrapping wings, blends sufficiently with both? In the ceiling's color, interest centres of course in the subtle sensuousness of the Astarte: a fact that has possibly been designed to offset the lack of balance before noted. In the lunette, the color saturation cannot be declared complete. There are many

uncertain grays which seem to strike too weak a color-note to grapple with the gold, the black, and the crimson.

As in color, so in dark and light, the differentiation of the three main wall-divisions is not expressed. Hence a certain monotony of opulence. The ceiling, for instance, might have held by a certain average degree lighter or darker than the mass of the lunette; but the heaviness, at present patent, may have been firmly designed to throw back into retirement this end wall as a whole, when the more brilliant side shall have been completed. In this play of solid relief into the painted values, both flat and modelled, Sargent rightly demands full control of all physical resources; but in his use of them he also shows something of an inaptitude to appreciate their full decorative possibilities. It is not that he has ignored the problem, like Abbey and Chavannes, but that he has failed to reach the highest terms of its breadth and beauty. In the lunette, the dark and light massing, though sumptuous, is not clear. It is not used according to its primary law of differentiating and accentuating the principal masses and figures. Hence an added confusion, which, even if intended, is pictorially a weakness. Especially is this noticeable in the strange depth of tone in the red of the cherubim's wings. Here one might have supposed their transcendent estate to imply a luminosity which could have slightly relieved the scene of terrestrial violence. Or, as seen in the reproduction, where they come out darker than any other

considerable spot, a dominance of darkness would at least have unified the confused mass of middle tones. But in the actual painting, these crimsons are about of the value of the hair and apron of the Assyrian king, as of some other of the darker grays, and the result is a strange note of ineffective confusion. Yet in the superb masses of the prophets, we are treated to an almost Venetian skill in the handling of the dark and light.

Could there be offered a better example than Sargent's of our first thesis, that mural painting liberates the creative spirit, and affords opportunity for genius? In spite of his fame as a portrait-painter, what would Sargent, or the future reputation and influence of Sargent, have been, had he never dared, Columbus-like, to discover this new world? What were the painter Michelangelo without the Sistine Chapel? Who can estimate how much genius, vast imagination, and unused pictorial power have been, and still are, latent in the souls of our painters, but repressed by convention, custom, narrow criticism, and lack of opportunity! It is probable that geniuses are born in every age and clime; but as seeds wither in an unreclaimed desert, so do they in an ungenial atmosphere. This wonderful experiment of Sargent's must penetrate American opinion like an irrigating flood, and stimulate directly and indirectly a long series of splendid native works; so that, some day, when its walls are filled by his epoch-making achievement, this gallery shall have become, like of old the Brancacci chapel at Florence, a shrine for the pilgrimage of artists.

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